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# ART AND PROGRESS

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## BEAUTY OR UGLINESS?

It seems remarkable that there could be any disagreement concerning what constitutes beauty or ugliness; but there is. Not a little so-called "modern art," that art which it is claimed is most *advanced*, is positively ugly. One may stand before such a painting today representing ugly misshapen forms—absolute deformity—and showing inharmonious, jarring color, and be told that it is beautiful. If the observer does not agree that it is beautiful then he is told that the fault is with him, that he does not appreciate its beauty. In other words we are lead to believe that standards of beauty and ugliness are simply matters of personal opinion or individual taste. True, some things may seem lovely to one which may not appeal whatsoever to another, but it does not necessarily follow that the first is mistaking ugliness for beauty, nor that the second is blind to the latter quality, though it may be so. Our taste and our vision can be perverted, but when this happens such taste and such vision should not be accepted as sound and

valid. Yet it often is. Some one says that something is fine—some one who is supposed to know—and we conjure ourselves into believing it. The result of this is obviously chaos in judgment. And this is the state of mind of a large portion of the public, not to say some of the artists today with regard to works of art. Things so ugly that one would instinctively turn from them, are being presented, in good company, in dealers galleries and even art museums, as elementally beautiful, as objects to admire. Of these unlovely objects, paintings and works in sculpture, some persons openly express admiration. Yet it is almost inconceivable that any one of refined sense and intellect could deliberately prefer ugliness to beauty—ugliness which in itself by its very nature must be offensive if not revolting.

The New Standard Dictionary defines *beauty* as "The quality of objects, whether in nature, art or man, that appeals to and gratifies the esthetic feelings and forms the basis of esthetic judgments. The most essential characteristic of this quality seems to be a certain perfection of form, physical or spiritual, resulting from the harmonious combination of diverse elements in unity—the beautiful." And it explains that the Platonic-Aristotelian theory holds that "beauty resides in order and in the elements of order—unity and multiplicity (harmony, measure, proportion) and secondly that beauty is identical with the good." It was Bascom who said that "beauty stands to esthetics as the notion of right to ethics." On the other hand *ugliness* is defined as "Displeasing to the esthetic feelings, as from lack of grace, proportion, or adaptation of parts, distasteful in appearance; unsightly, ill looking; the reverse of beautiful." Thus the dividing line would seem to be pretty clearly drawn.

Now the question is, do we want art which is ugly or art which is beautiful? Considering art not as a result, but as a means. As a people shall we cultivate a love of ugliness or a love of beauty? Obviously the one tends towards lawlessness, brutality, immorality; the other to lawfulness, refinement, higher and better living. It is not too much to say that according to the answer to this question will be determined in the future the quality of our man

and womanhood, the measure of our civilization.

Following this same thought let us stop and ask ourselves, shall we continue to rear our young on the comic, colored supplements in our Sunday newspapers and the so-called comic picture books which are now so prevalent, giving to them at their most impressionable age pictures which are at the least distorted and unlovely? Shall we, ourselves, turn from the works of the old masters, who, it is said, "knew less than we do today," and from the works of contemporary masters who would interpret to us real beauty, to give our time and thought and appreciation to the works of the futurists and others of the same ilk, who are interpreting not beauty but ugliness? Shall we with thoughtless regard for the morrow destroy the physical beauty of our own land that we may have more gold for temporary physical enjoyment? All this is but the choice between beauty and ugliness, and it is a choice which we must make. If we choose wrong the path leads us whither we know not, but surely downward rather than upward, to the lower levels from which our progenitors by toil and sweat and prayer have enabled us to climb.

Again the question. Shall we in this day when civilization has been shaken to its foundation, stand firm for the higher aspirations of man, or shall we permit ourselves to be swept into the devastating current? Shall we "quit us like men," or beasts—beasts with intelligence which is human?

#### JOSEPH PENNELL

For the first time in many years Joseph Pennell will spend the winter in the United States. Furthermore announcement is made that Mr. Pennell will, during the coming season, give a series of lectures on subjects upon which he is perhaps the leading authority. For instance, he will lecture on Artistic Lithography, on Illustration and The Graphic Arts; he will also lecture on Whistler, the Artist and the Man; on The Pictorial Possibilities of Work; and on some of his own adventures "On the Trail"; also on various authors whose books he has illustrated. These lectures will in most instances be illustrated by stere-

opticon slides, not a few of which will be reproductions of his own drawings.

There is probably no more interesting figure in the world of art today than Mr. Pennell, a man of strong and even radical convictions, but of wide experience and large accomplishment. To have Mr. Pennell among us means not a little, but to have him ready to talk to us is even more delightful.

#### NOTES

##### ART AND AGRICULTURE IN MINNESOTA

The Minnesota State Fair, unusual in many respects, is almost unique in the quality of the art exhibits which it has held during the past two years. Imagine the sensations of the visitor to the Fair who has spent hours in an absorbing study of the latest improvements in farm implements, tractors, trucks, threshing machines, or hovered excitedly over the exhibits of honey, hens, or hogs, when he takes an hour off to see the work of his children in the county school building and wanders inadvertently into the quiet order and harmony of the little art gallery opened last year for the first time as a permanent State Fair attraction. Here he finds no overcrowding, no excess of material exhibited, no flashiness, no commercialism, just simple walls, well lighted, restfully colored and hung with interesting paintings. Minnesota is fortunate in possessing a State Art Society which is very active and cosmopolitan, but the Board of Managers of the State Fair ought to be congratulated on having made use of the State Art Society to assist them in organizing their art exhibit. For many years past, there has been a small art section at the State Fair, as at many other similar institutions, in which every work submitted was accepted. The consequence was that none of the best artists were willing to exhibit, and the ladies who painted pond lilies, et al, were encouraged to go on producing these objects. Last year a small building was put up, connecting the women's building with the school exhibits, and in this gallery, under the auspices of the State Art Society, was displayed a very interesting collection of the work of Minnesota artists in painting, sculpture, and handicraft, as well as a group of interesting paintings by promi-